

? P.S. Med. Oct. 20, 1971 ?

The Lesson of Overton Park

Federal Judge Bailey Brown yesterday gave a timely warning with regard to future expressway and freeway development in Memphis.

This week in the Overton Park Expressway hearings, Planner William S. Pollard Jr. reminded that the Memphis Urban Area Transportation Plan calls for the proposed Southern Avenue freeway to take part of the northern edge of Audubon Park, as well as a part of Glenview Park. The transportation plan was adopted by the City Council and County Court in 1969 — but only in general, as specific routes were not laid out, and with reassurance by Pollard at that time that the routes were flexible and could be changed to bypass parks and other routes.

In his warning, Judge Brown said the plan to cut across the northern edge of Audubon Park should not begin until a federal court decides on the route's feasibility. He said he hoped the government or the conservationists would sue to enjoin that route "before it gets along as far as this" (the Overton Park litigation).

Certainly the lesson of the Overton Park controversy should not be lost on the planners and the state and local governments.

This is not to say that the Overton route now being debated in the courts should be changed. We think a compelling case for joining Interstate 40 through the

park to the new Mississippi River bridge has been made, and we hope it is upheld in the courts so that construction can at last be started.

But we think it is only realistic that routes and types of the future freeways should be thoroughly threshed out before the state, county and city commit themselves to specifics.

It will be best if these freeways can be routed so as to leave the parks untouched.

We see no such compelling reason for biting into these other parks as there was for going through Overton Park. The fact that the new bridge had to be sited where it is on account of river conditions, and the need for as straight a route as possible through the city, were the compelling factors as to the Overton route. The Southern Avenue and other future freeways in the Memphis Urban Area Transportation Plan do not involve the factor of interstate routing as does I-40.

But if the planners and local and state officials find what they consider to be important reasons for further cutting into Memphis park acreage, they should make these reasons plain and get a clear-cut decision on them well in advance of the start of construction.

The new freeways, when needed, should not be delayed for years by the sort of wrangling that has held up the Overton Park route for 15 years.

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